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JESUIT MARTYRS IN FLORIDA

Sanson d'Abbeville, the Royal Geographer of France, tells us that Florida of the latter part of the sixteenth century could be considered a part of New France, since the French were the first to establish a colony there with the consent of the inhabitants of the country. "It could be considered also as a part of New Spain, since the Spaniards have there at present two colonies, which are subject to St. Dominic, one of the Audiencias of New Spain. But these two colonies are so weak and so close to one another that they are hardly worthy of notice. We may say that Florida lies between New France and New Spain and that it stretches from the River of Palms which is on the border of the Province of Panuco, in New Spain, on up to the Jordan River that separates it from Virginia, which I consider as a part of New France." ¹

The greater part of the coast of Florida is upon the Gulf of Mexico, which washes upon its southern boundary ; the other part is upon the Sea of the North, which bathes its Eastern shore.

The Spaniards have no colony upon the Gulf of Mexico nor upon the coast where the French formerly were. The two colonies which they have in Florida are St. Augustine and St. Mathew, five or six leagues apart St. Augustine, which is the better and the stronger of the two colonies, was taken and pillaged by Francis Drake in 1585.

Florida was first discovered in 1496 by Sebastian Cabot, whom the English king, Henry VII, sent westward in search of the passage for navigation to the

¹ Nicholas Sanson d'Abbeville, *L'Amerique en Plusieurs Cartes en Divers Traitez de Geographie et D'Histoire*. . . . Paris, 1657.

Following the quotation above, the account is a translation *passim* from the same work.

Orient; he was content to have seen this country before unknown and to make a report of it to His Majesty. John Ponce de Leon in the name of the King of Castille, was there in 1512 and wished to establish there a colony. The inhabitants fought him off; they wounded him and forced him to retire to Porto Rico where he was governor. In 1520, and 1524, Lucas Vasques d'Aillon and other Spaniards descended upon the coast of Florida at divers times with no other purpose than to take away the inhabitants and transport them to work in the mines of Spain. Pamphile Narvaes was there again in 1528 and crossed the country to the Apalachi Mountains where he hoped to find gold.

In 1534 came the brilliant expedition of Ferdinand deSoto. He brought 350 cavalrymen and 900 infantry.² He crossed nearly the whole of Florida without taking the trouble to establish a colony. He molested the inhabitants and was pursued by them in turn for many years and at the end of it all found not the riches for which he had gone in search. He died in that country and was buried in the depths of a River least the enemies should lay hands upon the body. About three hundred men and three hundred horses returned from the expedition in 1543. All the advantages derived from his labor is that he gave to the country the name of Florida either because he arrived there on the day of the Feast of the Flowers or because of the flowers they found there.

In 1549 the Emperor, Charles V. and the Council of the Indies thought it better not to send thither any more men of arms but rather men of religion to soften by religion the wild manners of these people. Louis [Cancer] de Barbastra, of the Order of St. Benedict, and some other religious went thither. He and two of his companions were killed while the rest of his com-

² Many of Sanson's dates and details are incorrect.

panions saved themselves by flight back to the boat they had brought with them.

The French were not in Florida until the reign of Charles IX. Francis Ribaut was sent to Florida in 1562. He made an alliance with the inhabitants and built Fort Caroline upon the River May. Laudoniere returned to Florida in 1564 and Gascon came over in 1567³

But before continuing, adding to Sanson's story, we should recall an important factor in the making of the history of Florida: that the civil and religious history are so closely woven together during this period that to omit the religious thread would be to see only the half.

About this time there came to the shores of Florida the first of those missionaries whose organization was as yet very young but full of great promise. The Society of Jesus was founded in 1540. Thirty-one years later ten of that Society had laid down their lives upon the shores of Florida⁴ in the hope of planting the cross upon the sands and in the hearts of the natives.

The first of these was Father Pedro Martinez. The expedition in which he sailed left Spain on the 28th of June, 1566. They went first to Havana and from there set sail for St. Augustine, Florida. After sailing around for about a month (for they had no pilot) they found themselves on the 14th of September near some "unknown" land. Some of the party, among whom was Father Martinez, went ashore to reconnoitre. They had already reached shore when a storm came up and the ship was driven out to sea, leaving the landing party to its own resources. These latter wandered along the coast and finally met some In-

³ From Sanson, *op. cit.*

⁴ The limits of Florida at that period were vague, but the country under that name might be said to have extended from the Rio Grande to the Potomac rivers.

dians, from whom they asked the direction to St. Augustine. They thought they had been understood and answered and going in the direction pointed out, they came to a small island and met more Indians, the Tacatucuranos, who were at that time at war with the Spaniards. Going further on they met with other Indians who at first received them well but afterwards began to act suspiciously. One of the sailors noticed this and warned Father Martinez, who went back into the boat. But as there were still more sailors on land the party waited for them. In the meantime Indians came into the boat and began to look over it curiously. Suddenly they threw Father Martinez into the water and dragged him ashore, beating him as they dragged him. On shore the Father managed to throw himself on his knees, but as he did so one of the Indians split his head open. The three sailors who were on shore were also killed, the rest managing to escape in a boat, finally reached a Spanish post. These events were related by one of Father Martinez' companions and also by a Spaniard named Flores.⁵

On the 4th of February, 1571, four other Jesuits laid down their lives in the same cause. Father Luis de Quiros and two novice brothers Gabriel de Solis and John Baptist Mendez, Spaniards, and also an Indian novice brother who was born in Florida, were all massacred by the savages.

One of the barbarians, Don Luis de Velasco, formerly taken to Spain and solemnly baptized, had promised to assist them as interpreter. But from the moment that he again breathed his native air, he re-

⁵ The above account is from Astrain, *History of the Spanish Assistancy of the Society of Jesus*. See also, Tanner, *Societas Jesu*. . . . Prague, 1675, pp. 443-445. Shea (*Catholic Church in Colonial Days*, New York, 1886, p. 142) believes this island, Tacatacuru, is Cumberland, not far from the mouth of the St. Johns River.

covered his former ferocity. He led the missionaries into the interior of the country ⁶ and there left them for three or four months. They soon understood the lot that awaited them. They, therefore, prepared themselves for martyrdom by a life of prayer and rigorous mortifications. Father de Quiros and Brothers de Solis and Mendez detached themselves from their companions to go in search of the apostate and make a final appeal to him, and after having found him they conjured him in the name of Jesus Christ to recall his promises and his baptism. The miserable fellow pretended to listen to them and even gave his word that he would follow them without delay. But it was to sacrifice them to his gods. In fact, the next day, and at the head of a band from his tribe, he tracked them and as soon as he came upon them, he shot an arrow that cut in two the heart of Father de Quiros and gave the signal to massacre his companions. The three fell bathed in their blood. ⁷

Soon afterwards, on the 8th of February, the vice-provincial of the missions of Florida, Father John Baptist Segura, was massacred by a blow of the hatchet from the same apostate, who a few days before had taken the life of Father Luis de Quiros and companions. With him were killed in the same manner Brothers Gabriel Gomez, Sanche de Zavillos, Pierre de Linares, and Christopher Redondo who for the past four months had prepared for martyrdom in union with their saintly master. ⁸

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⁶ Near the headwaters of Chesapeake Bay.

⁷ P. Elesban de Guilhermy, S. J., *Menologe, S. J. Assis-tance d'Espagne*. Paris, 1902, p. 227. See also: Shea, op. cit. pp. 147-149; and Tanner, op. cit. p. 447.

⁸ Guilhermy, op. cit., p. 250. Shea, op.cit. pp. 149-150
[It is of much interest to know that the correspondence of the Jesuit missionaries in Florida is soon to appear in Reverend Father Astrain's *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu-Monumenta Mexicana*; Vol. II, Part I. - Ed.]